

The INQUIRER

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**Pride in
making a
difference**

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover Unitarian Chief Officer Derek

McAuley at London Pride 2016

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Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: admin@inquirer.org.uk

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www.unitarian.org.uk

or email info@unitarian.org.uk

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Beyond I...

You are beyond my understanding

Can I reach You?

You are beyond all that I am

Can I touch You?

Yet, in the poetry that is pure silence

I hear You

In the atmosphere that reaches further, reaches deeper

Than the limitation of words

I know you

Divine love here we meet, in the place beyond 'I'

In sweet surrender, I become You

Your home, your birth, your death

My resurrection

—Abi Elliott-McGuffie

It's time to make a difference

Sometimes there is a real synchronicity in how an issue of *The Inquirer* comes together. In this instance, a thread runs through three of the articles. It's 'making a difference'. The cover story by Maud Robinson reminds us of the great effect Unitarians had on the fight for equal marriage. But more than the political fight, the work by Unitarians and others has had and continues to have a huge impact on the lives of LGBT+ people who want to declare their love and commitment to each other.

The Rev Phil Silk reminds us on page 6 that we can help others when we help ourselves, by becoming knowledgeable and ensuring that when it comes to space exploration, artificial intelligence and the use of robots, that human values and not just the profit motive are part of the decision making. And, the always inspiring Rev Danny Crosby reminds us that sometimes the smallest acts of loving kindness can create great change. He urges us to move towards 'aliveness', growing in power and meaning as we live our lives. As a movement sometimes we can feel that we are too small, too invisible to make a difference in the larger society. But the fight for equal marriage surely proves we are not. And our chapels which have become licensed to conduct weddings are having a huge impact on individuals' lives, spreading the Unitarian message of freedom and inclusion among brides, grooms and their families.

Many Unitarians will participate in Pride events over the summer. Please send photos and short reports to *The Inquirer* so that we all may celebrate.

— MC Burns

Unitarians fought and love won

As Unitarians across the country participate in Pride events, **Maud Robinson** recalls the fight for equal marriage in hope we continue to stand on the side of love.

Love is what life is all about really, isn't it? What else could it be about? Work, maybe? Well, yes, if you love the work that you do, a meaningful life can be about doing the work that you love.

And there are a few for whom a spiritually ascetic life focused solely on the love of the divine, or striving towards the attainment of enlightenment, is the sole purpose of earthly existence and gives meaning in a way that many of us are not completely able to understand.

But other than that, it is the people (or possibly the animals) in our lives that we love, that give meaning and worth to our existence here.

There are different ways in which we can love other people; but for many the way they can best learn to love is in finding one person with whom they commit to share the joys and sorrows of life, with all the sacrifices and compromises that that involves. For many this entails making the life-long commitment of marriage.

A bold commitment

Being a marriage celebrant is a part of my work in ministry that I love. As a marriage celebrant, one could easily get jaded and a bit cynical about marriage. But that hasn't happened for me yet. When I meet with a couple to plan their marriage, I hear about their relationship, what has brought them together, and often some of the difficult times they have been through. We discuss their marriage vows, when they will make solemn promises to love and support each other through difficult times, as well as enjoy being with each other through happy times.

Again and again, my hope is restored as I meet with couples young and old, who have decided to take the bold step of committing themselves to each other for the rest of their lives. Again and again, I stand at the front of a church, or in a garden, or in another special place, and facilitate them to make solemn vows to each other, and to be married to each other in the eyes of the law, and in the eyes of God, or according to their spiritual understanding of the world.

Soon after St Mark's Congregation in Edinburgh voted to become licensed for same-sex weddings, I facilitated the exchange of solemn vows between two men, now husbands to each other. This was a first for the Unitarian Church in Scotland, and has been made possible thanks to on-going work by members of our Unitarian community, as well as Quakers, Liberal Jews and Humanists, and members of the Equality Network. And it is right and proper, and past time, that this should be possible. (Recently, the Church of Scotland began the process which could allow same-sex unions in their churches.)

Unitarian General Assembly passed a motion back in 2008 calling for legislation to allow Civil Partnership ceremonies in religious premises. But after much careful listening to those affected, we realised that this resolution did not go far enough. No matter where it's held, a Civil Partnership is a legal contract between two people, which gives rights in law regarding such



Unitarians marched in the 2016 London Pride March. Photo by Daniel Costley

things as property, inheritance and recognition as being next-of-kin. A religious marriage, on the other hand, is a covenant made before God, or in the context of a person's spiritual understanding, publicly committing to a deep and sacred relationship, beyond the bounds of any human-made law.

A Civil Partnership could have been followed by a religious blessing. Didn't this cover the sacred covenant bit? Why was this not enough?

Civil Partnerships were a second-class fudge. There was already a perfectly good institution called marriage, which just needed to be opened up to same-sex couples, but our governments weren't brave enough to do this, and instead invented a new institution. Same-sex relationships aren't something new that have just been invented; so why do they need a new institution invented for them?

What is marriage?

Same-sex relationships have always existed, and have in the past been recognised and honoured. Human beings decided to exclude same-sex couples from the institution of marriage when formulating religious dogma and secular law. Just because these decisions have been adhered to for many centuries doesn't make them right.

Unitarians have a proud history of being open to revising our faith and practice in the light of new knowledge and understanding, grounded in solid principles of equity and compassion.

Some say 'same-sex relationships aren't inferior, but they're different; so why call them marriage?' Which brings us to the question, 'What is the definition of marriage?'

In 2012, Catholic spokesperson, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, stated that the introduction of same-sex marriage would be a grotesque subversion of the universally understood meaning of marriage, which is defined as the union between a man and a woman. It turned out that the Cardinal, who was vociferously condemnatory of all same-sex sexual relationships had, himself, been involved in sexual relationships with men. I feel only sorrow for this man, who spent his whole life hiding from his true self, because he had been taught by the powerful organisation to which he had pledged allegiance, that for a man to love a man in a sexual way is a sin.

However, this is not how it has always been. There is historic
(Continued on next page)

We Unitarians made a difference

(Continued from previous page)

precedence for same-sex marriage within the Christian church. John Boswell (Professor of History at Yale University) presents historical Catholic and Orthodox liturgies for same-sex union, in his scholarly book *Same-sex Unions in Premodern Europe*. He writes 'There was a time when the Catholic Church recognised and honoured permanent romantic commitments between two people of the same sex.'

Much of religious law is human invention; much of it was invented, with tenuous reference to sacred texts, in order to prop up the power of already powerful organisations, or to set in stone the prejudice of those who led these organisations.

Row towards the rocks

Living in committed and covenanted relationship with one other person is not an easy thing to do. Why do you think I've run scared of it myself for most of my adult life; though maybe not forever. Committing to share the best and worst of life with one other person for the rest of one's earthly life is a big and hard commitment to make. It might be said that some people enter into it too easily, without the realisation of quite what a tumultuous voyage they are signing up for.

Mary Oliver characterises it thus:

When you hear, a mile away and still out of sight, the churn of the water as it begins to swirl and roil, fretting around the sharp rocks – when you hear that unmistakable pounding – when you feel the mist on your mouth and sense ahead the embattlement, the long falls plunging and steaming – then row, row for your life toward it.

Is she mad? Surely only a mad person, on hearing the churn of the water as it begins to swirl and roil and fret around the sharp rocks, would row for their life toward the inevitable plunging over the long falls.

Relationships can be hard and tumultuous, but if the other option is to stay in a stagnant pool committed only to oneself, then in order to say yes to life, maybe we do need to row for our lives towards the tumultuous roiling waters of love.

It's hard enough rowing for your life and braving the raging white water, but for many many years, it wasn't possible for men who loved other men, or women who loved other women, to venture out on that perilous journey openly, and with the possibility of the blessing and support of society.

Up until 2015, women who loved other women, and men who loved other men, could not proudly and publicly be married in the eyes of the law, and to asked for God's blessing on their marriage. It is right and proper that at last it is possible for this to happen.

Sometimes we, as Unitarians, worry that we are such a very small community that we can do little that is of wide significance in the world. In the face of all that is broken and unjust in this world of ours, marriage equality can seem to be an issue of relatively minor importance. But in the face of all that is wrong in our world, it is in expressing love for each other, that we are enabled to carry on looking outward and upward, carry on seeing the fundamentally awe-inspiring nature of our universe, and the fact that we exist at all. It is in being able to truly love another human being, despite all their flaws, that we are able to say yes to life, and go on being in the world.

Without love, nothing else would be worth caring about and working for. Before we can hope to do anything about the



Scottish Unitarians marched for Equal Marriage before it became legal. File photo

parlous state of our world, we must first be able to love, and to row for our lives towards the tumultuous water of a committed loving relationship, and before the world to declare that love.

So actually, it's not such a very small thing that we have been doing in supporting and campaigning for, and working towards, legislation to allow Equal Marriage for all people.

A more just and compassionate world

There are Unitarians in their 70s, 80s and 90s, for whom, when they were younger, the very idea of a man marrying a man, or a woman marrying a woman was outlandish.

It was outlandish because that was what society taught people to think. This thinking became engrained in how the world was understood, and was questioned by very few. Society forgot that there could be, that there had been, a different — more just and compassionate — way of understanding the world. I'm so pleased that every older member at St Mark's fully supported our campaign for Equal Marriage.

And as Unitarians, we should be very proud to hold an open door to those men who want to come through our door, and be married to other men; and those women who want to come through our door, and be married to other women. Because in the end, the only thing that really matters is love. All other good things in the world stem from love. And maybe, if we can change society to accept and honour people of different sexual orientations, then just maybe, there is hope that we can change society, so that those whose destructive actions, based on a desire to destroy that which is different from themselves, might accept and honour people who differ in race, tribe, belief as well as in sexual orientation. This is no small task, but let us begin it with love. Because in the end, the only thing that really matters is love, all other good things in the world stem from love.

The Rev Maud Robinson is a minister on the General Assembly roll, formerly at Edinburgh.



Maud Robinson

Executive Committee appoints convenor

Executive Committee Key Messages, 19-20 May 2017

1. Executive Committee Convenor

Marion Baker was appointed as Convenor of the Executive Committee replacing Robert Ince whose term of office on the EC had come to an end.



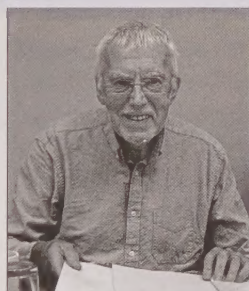
2. Co-option of Three Executive Committee Members

Following the open application process, we are pleased to announce that Sheena McKinnon, *Marion Baker* Christina Smith and the Rev Dr Rob Whiteman have been co-opted onto the Executive Committee and will formally take up their positions at the next EC meeting on 14 July 2017. They will serve until the close of the Annual Meetings in April 2019. An induction process is currently being arranged for the new members.

Sheena is active in Bradford Unitarians and the Yorkshire Unitarian Union and is also secretary of the Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry. Christina Smith is currently Chief Community Cultivator for Derby Unity (2020 project) and worship Leader for Derby Unitarians. Rob has recently taken up the position of Minister with Dundee Unitarians and had a long career in church administration.

3. Resignation of Gwynn Pritchard

The EC received the resignation of Gwynn Pritchard due to health issues. Gwynn was thanked for his contribution over the last two years, particularly on communications, as link to the two Welsh Districts and serving on the Annual Meetings Panel. The Executive Committee will pro-actively seek a replacement to address any identified geographic and/or skill gaps given its new composition.



Gwynne Pritchard

4. Next Steps



Rachel Skelton

The Next Steps priorities were reviewed at some length to bring everyone up to speed since the last meeting. An update report was received from Rachel Skelton, Project Manager, on progress with the Training and Education Development (TED) Project and the related Web project, both of which had been showcased at the Annual Meetings in workshops.

5. Identity Project

Good progress was reported on the Identity Project with a detailed presentation from Kate Eden, the consultant who is assisting the General Assembly. The identity project forms part of "Next Steps" and is intended to assist Unitarians create a clear message about who

we are and what we stand for. A lively and stimulating workshop had been held at the Annual Meetings. Guidelines on the identity, along with suggestions on how implementation might be delivered, were considered but more work is required for the July EC meeting.

6. Local Leadership Strategy Group (LLSG) – Safeguarding Training

The EC was pleased to learn that safeguarding training arranged by the LLSG will take place on 4 November 2017 at Unitarian New Meeting in Birmingham. Look out for further detailed information.



The Nightingale Centre and its Unitarian links go back to the early 1930's when a convalescent home for ex-servicemen was built on the site in Great Hucklow. File photo

7. Nightingale Centre

The Nightingale Centre was congratulated on being awarded a grant of £18,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to carry out research into the World War One history of the centre and then share this story with users of the Centre through an information point, and the production of a curriculum-related teaching aid. This is a joint project with Richard Godley of East Peak Countryside Associates. Discussions have also taken place on how the Centre could support the Unitarian Youth programme to promote its events.

8. Future EC Meeting arrangements

The Executive Committee considered its ways of working for the future. It was agreed, with the exception of the annual visit to the Nightingale Centre each September, that meetings in future would be for one day only starting at 9.00am and finishing at 5.30pm.

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We are but small within the universe

Phil Silk marvels at our Universe, and asks if it's a place our finite minds can ever hope to really know.

It has been said that each of us creates our own world. In one sense, our Unitarian path relies on this idea, since we base our approach on the Protestant principle of the authority of the individual. We say that each of us has to decide what is true for us, while recognising our limits and choosing which evidence to rely on, such as scripture, organised religion, and reasoned and felt experience. But does that mean there is no Ultimate reality?

I think there is an internal and external reality which encompasses everything that exists, which are integrated parts of one overall reality, but that we only have partial and changing awareness of it. This raises the questions of how we can know this or anything. And what to do about it.

Let me start with a life-changing experience I had at about age 14. At school I was introduced to the theory of atoms and how they worked, which was a shock to the system, for before then I had assumed, and based my actions on, the idea that seeing is believing. To be told that the solid-seeming desk I was pounding was actually made up of small particles in motion did not seem at all sensible.

Of course the atom bomb had already been exploded twice before that, but I was too young to understand the implications. I still do not see why splitting a tiny atom produces so much energy. And if you fuse two atoms they produce even more energy. Plus we have to be able to control the whole process! But I trusted my teacher and had to revise my world-view. Now I am being told that inside each atom are even smaller particles in motion with the amazing ability to behave in bizarre ways I find it hard to even imagine.

So what is the totality of reality? And can we ever know? We love asking questions, but need to find enough answers to live well.

How did first humans cope?

Imagine being one of the first human beings, life aware of itself, but in the infant stage of development in terms of knowing yourself or your world. You would have access to some information coming to you from your untutored senses, helping you respond to internal and external conditions, but no language and little culture. You would become aware of the erratic behaviour of weather and other helpful or threatening things, living and non-living, if you could even tell the difference. Subject to dreams, imagination, hunger, thirst, illness, emotions, birth and death, how did they cope? No wonder they developed the idea that everything they could see had a spirit of its own, a belief system still around today, called animism.

There are – and always have been – many ways to be human. Whatever we have thought and felt, the human race survived hundreds of thousands of years until we ourselves continue facing the wondrous challenge of making sense of our experiences and making the best of our situations.

Now that our world culture has grown up, now that we as individuals are inquiring adults, how do we discover and

respond to our world? Mostly through our senses – of which we are not entirely conscious. Let us explore sight, which we rely on more than any other sense. Sight has evolved in many ways throughout the animal kingdom. Recently on television we were shown a 500,000-year-old fossil of a seabed creature which had eyes. It is clear the human sight is variable. Not everyone has 20-20 vision; some cannot see at all; some have very sharp vision, with most of us having visual equipment in between. Some are completely colour blind; some partially so – and eyesight does not remain static throughout life. Furthermore, people are subject to various defects and diseases, which influence our visual cues to reality.



This vibrant image from NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope shows a distant satellite galaxy to our own Milky Way galaxy.

Appearance and reality differ

And if that is not enough, we now know that what we think we see is never a perfect replica of the original stimulus. We interpret what our senses tell us and that view varies for all sorts of reasons, such as context, experience and culture.

Shakespeare knew that appearance and reality were often mismatched. Remember the casket scene in *Merchant of Venice*, when Portia's suitors had to choose the right box to win her hand. Each box had a saying on it, one of which has become part of our culture, if slightly misspelled: 'All that glisters is not gold/Is a saying often told.' Neither the gold nor silver caskets were correct, but they eliminated unsuitable men. Bassanio was wiser and chose the one of lead, which read 'Who chooseth me must hazzard all he hath'.

To improve our ability to see, mankind has been developing eyeglasses for over 2000 years, starting with rough lenses in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, first in 750 BCE Assyria. Mysterious, though, is the presence of even earlier Egyptian statues with glass lenses. In 11th century Italy, reading stones made of glass were held up to magnify things. Over the years a pair of specially shaped lenses held in frames which sit on our ears were developed, then bifocals and now photovoltaic varifocals. One can now even regain sight with modern

...se but there is much we can do



...he shows the Large Magellanic Cloud, a

technology.

In 100 ACE Rome, glass was shaped to magnify objects 6-10 times. By the 1600s the first real microscope appeared, with one hand-held lens, which could improve sight by 230 times. Then came double lenses held in metal frames followed by triple lenses, with better and better clarity. These allowed us to see bacteria, for example, which allowed us to make great strides in medicine and hygiene.

The next breakthrough was the electron microscope, which pushed the boundaries of insight to 1000-times ordinary sight. More recently the development of the atomic microscope gives us the ability to see the smallest things there are – we

think - sub-atomic particles in action, called nanoparticles.

In addition to extending our ability to see from ordinary to extremely tiny things, humans have been extending our ability to see far-away things. Galileo was the grandfather of astronomy, the first to point a telescope towards the night sky in a meaningful way. The rest, as they say, is history.

In the 1600s, various European scientists developed lenses which enhanced our ability to see the planets, starting in 1608 with Hans Lippershey. Then Galileo made a better telescope, followed by others who increased the distances seen and improved clarity.

Puzzling, complicated, random

By 1665, Christos Huygens was able to see beyond the solar system. Now we can see far beyond the solar system, billions of light years away. These bigger and better telescopes allow man to plan longer and longer space flights, unmanned and manned. There is an international 'permanent' space station, loads of space waste, and already plans to colonise not just the moon but Mars as well. Watch this space...

We have learned so much over the years. What an amazing world. But it is also puzzling, complicated and random. We have so much more to learn, too. Our finite minds probably are incapable of knowing all there is to know about how nature works, let alone why and what difference it makes. Yet

every time we think we have figured things out, we discover something different. Our concept of reality has to keep changing.

I asked how we humans can know anything and mentioned the senses as our main source, at least earlier in history. A quick look at sight shows our developing understanding of that sense. We could easily do the same for hearing and probably smell, formerly much more developed than now, taste and touch, too. Our bodies respond to other things such as temperature, air pressure, pain and pleasure. What about ESP? Intuition? Some would add divine revelation. Where does reason fit in? Surely consciousness is central to our lives, and no one really knows how that works.

So how shall we presume? What conclusions can we draw from our changing reality? Perhaps my proposed new Unitarian motto could help here: Learn, Care, Share, Celebrate.

Learn more, to press a Unitarian view

We need to learn more about how to live together in a sustainable manner on Earth. I doubt it would be easier elsewhere. Unitarians have been among those at the frontiers of learning about our world. Can we individually and collectively make a deliberate effort to study the paths opening up to people by helping to influence the topics studied, the ways they are studied and the way results are used, so that human values are involved – and not just technology and money? What about artificial intelligence? Robotics? Cyborgs – the blending of humans with built in technology?

These are creative science and technology issues. What about learning more about mental health, sociology, the arts? These, too, can improve the quality of life. How can we promote the use of knowledge for the good of all?

Clearly, caring for each other and our planet – as well as whatever part of space we inhabit – helps link knowledge to living. Yet knowing facts and devising things, is not enough for significant living for all. We need to learn how interrelated we all are in the intricate web of existence and act accordingly, individually and collectively.

Sharing our knowledge, experiences, ideas, with care, is part of the path to the good life-not just for ourselves, but for all.

It is important for us to question our world view and to keep up with new frontiers of learning. I cannot explain why the universe exists at all, but it has become clear to me that the foundations of life are somewhat random, that chance plays a large part in our lives, but that at the level of ordinary experience, there is some stability and some freedom for human choice. We are not fully determined, nor are we totally free. We are subject to many influences and to chance. But we *do* have some power to influence the tide of affairs. Bonaro Overstreet put it this way: 'I am prejudiced beyond debate in favour of my right to choose which side shall feel the stubborn ounces of my weight.'

Amen to that. One more quote, by Helen Keller:

'I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.'

The Rev Phil Silk is a retired Unitarian minister and a member at Shrewsbury Unitarians.

Moving towards 'aliveness'

Towards the end of August I have the honour of serving as minister of the week at Hucklow Summer School. The theme for this year is 'Walk Your Path with Joy – Finding Hope & Resisting Despair in Turbulent Times'. I will be serving those present and helping them spiritually, mentally and emotionally through what will be a deeply challenging week. It is not a holiday; I am there to serve, to minister to all present.

How to find hope and resist despair is most definitely a pertinent question for everyone. We seem to be in midst of incredibly turbulent times. As a nation we are facing the most challenging time in my memory. There are many forces at work that seem to want to divide us. Our political class are at war, and economic troubles are on the increase. There is violence on the streets from haters of life and extremists of many kinds. Every day the news is filled with chaos and loss of life. Now I am not naïve; this is not new. This has been happening all over the world throughout my lifetime – it's just I've never seen it to this extent in this country.

It is easy to feel powerless against this tide of despair. How do we keep our heads up and our eyes and hearts open to one another and life, how do we find hope in the midst of all of this?

Well I believe it begins with what I have already witnessed. It begins in and through service. Rabindranath Tagore said 'I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.' It begins by bearing witness to the love and service and the coming together I have witnessed on the same TV screens and also very close at hand as I have seen ordinary people helping, holding and inspiring one another. I see it in the little things as well as the bigger things. It doesn't take away the suffering but it brings to life the love present in each of us, a power that will always overcome the powers that divide us. To quote Jo Cox 'There is more that unites us than divides us.' Or, in the words of Harry Stack Sullivan, 'We are all much more simply human than otherwise, be we happy and successful, contented and detached, miserable and mentally disordered, or whatever.' We all live with the same struggles, we are all born from the same earth, live under the same sun and I believe have the same spirit running through us all.

Some people say 'everything happens for a reason, suggesting it's all part of God's plan. I have never believed this and believe it simply opens the great theodicy question 'How can an all-powerful and all-loving God allow suffering?' It's a question that comes into my consciousness constantly as a minister of religion. My truth is that I do not believe that everything in life is pre-ordained or pre-determined. The future is unwritten. I believe in Divine Love, that all life is given free will and it is my task to bring love alive in my life and to encourage others to do the same through my example. In this sense I am not powerless against the tide of despair. In so doing, hope rises from the ashes of suffering, and meaning emerges through my living and breathing. This is why everything matters, every thought, every breath, every feeling, every action, and every word. This is also where I find joy in life, through love and service for others, despite the very real turbulence all around me.

None of us knows the impact we can have on one another. We can change the world with a single word or simple act of love and encouragement, by just being who we truly are. I had

From nothing
to everything
by
Danny Crosby



wonderful experience of this recently as I married two lovely young women who have been attending Dunham Road for the last year. At the end of the service many of those present thanked me and told me how much they loved the ceremony. Some of the comments will live with me for a long time, but one in particular touched me right down in the marrow of my soul. A man came up to me with a broad beaming smile on his face and said something like 'I gave up on religion 50 years ago, but something happened today. This service has awoken something in me. Thank you.' He thanked me, when in reality the thanks are all mine. It is for moments like this that I do this work. It's why I'm here I believe. It's why we are all here, I believe: to help awaken one another to the aliveness of being, to raise one another's consciousness.

I believe that there is aliveness at the core of everything, that life is more than mere material processes. I love the aliveness of things. I feel that the last few years of my life has been all about awakening to this aliveness of things. This kind of universal consciousness at the core of all life, what the western religions might call God. I witness it in all life, I see it in human creativity too, particularly art. I love the aliveness in words, in art, in music or whatever is creative.

We experience them in the moment, whether individually or collectively, and yet the aliveness is somehow timeless. If life has revealed anything to me it has awoken me to the fact that things are much more than merely the sum of their parts. They have a power beyond the mere limits of the material that created them and that they grow in power and meaning beyond the limits of the creator's imaginations. That aliveness of course was there before the creation grew in the creator's imagination. It is vital to remember, of course, all that has occurred before those moments of creation; all the incredible aliveness that allowed them to be created.

I love the aliveness of things; I love the aliveness of my mere thoughts and feelings, knowing that they come from something far more than the mere chemical reactions in my brain or even my singular consciousness. I love the aliveness of things they are so much more than the sum of their parts.

It's not just in great works of human creation that I witness this same aliveness, I see it in the ordinary in the loving interaction, in the small gesture of loving kindness and I see it manifest in the natural world. I see powerfully a simple loving universal consciousness at work in life, it enlivens and empowers me. It gives my life meaning and makes my life worth living, hey, even dying, for.

May this aliveness guide us in the weeks ahead, may it lead us to Hope and away from Despair in spite of the very real suffering present in life.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Urmston and Altrincham and Summer School 2017.

Unitarians fought compulsory vaccinations

Leicester congregation instead worked towards mitigating the causes of disease says **Jeremy Goring**

It has sometimes been forgotten that Unitarians played a vitally important part in the stand against the Victorian Vaccination Acts. The first of these Acts (1853) made vaccination against smallpox compulsory; the second (1861) empowered local authorities to enforce the law; the third (1867) made the refusal of parents to vaccinate their children an offence punishable by a fine or, failing that, imprisonment. The first parent to be jailed rather than pay the fine appears to have been a respected Leicester citizen, who in 1869 was 'handcuffed to a pigeon thief and walked through the streets to prison'.

Thereafter it was from Leicester that the strongest opposition to the Vaccination Acts came. According to a contemporary account many of 'the most upright and patriotic citizens' were treated as malefactors and 'subjected to the most degrading punishments'. The upshot was that in 1885 a huge demonstration was held in the city, attended by anti-vaccinationists from all over the United Kingdom. A procession of people carrying flags and banners is said to have been some two miles long. The Vaccination Acts were publicly burnt in the market place in the presence of the Mayor and the Chief Constable and the day ended with 'a magnificent public evening meeting, presided over by Mr Page Hopps'.

As some readers of *The Inquirer* will know, the Rev John Page Hopps, the celebrated hymn writer, was then minister of Unitarian Great Meeting, to which many of the leading citizens belonged. Following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act the first five mayors of the city had worshipped there and its members long continued to take a prominent part in civic affairs. One of the best known, who served three times as mayor and for a time as the city's MP, was the hosiery manufacturer John Biggs: like many others in the congregation he was a vociferous opponent of compulsory vaccination.

Leicester Unitarians opposed the Vaccination Acts not only because they believed that they constituted a major infringement of human rights but, more importantly, because they were convinced that the right approach to disease was not to attack its symptoms but to deal with its causes. Therefore, after the great smallpox epidemic of 1871-2, they helped to ensure that the corporation embarked on a massive public health programme. As a later report of its sanitary committee stated, 'the old middens and most of the ash pits were abolished, the courts repaved and sanitary appliances introduced; thousands of surface wells were closed and the public water supply put on; a new main drainage scheme was carried out, out-fall sewers laid down, a large sewage farm secured and a constant inspection of houses has gone on.'

As a consequence, by the 1890s the death rate from smallpox in Leicester, which in 1871-2 had been 358 per 100,000 of population, had been reduced to 11. The city's refusal to implement the Vaccination Acts, which many had predicted would lead to disaster, had been totally vindicated. 'Leicester', as an alderman was proud to report in 1902, 'can claim to be one of the healthiest manufacturing towns in the country.'

Raymond Holt's book *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* mentions the important part played by Unitarians in Leicester's civic life but makes no reference to what was arguably their greatest achievement.

In going against the prevailing orthodoxy that the only way to deal with smallpox epidemics was the imposition of compulsory vaccination, they

were obeying an injunction that was close to the heart of that radical nonconformist John Page Hopps: 'Be not conformed to this world.' For St Paul the necessary process of transformation involved 'renewing the mind'; but for Leicester Unitarians, with their very practical approach to matters, it also involved renewing the sewers and improving the drains.

Dr Jeremy Goring is a Vice-President of the Unitarian Historical Society and an Emeritus Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.



The Rev John Page Hopps

Ministry Inquiry Day



Would you like to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian Minister and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group will be holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training. There'll be chance to meet our tutors and recent graduates.

**Venue: Leicester Great Meeting, LE1 4SX
Date: Wednesday 2nd August 2017
Time: 11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish**

**Booking deadline: 26th July 2017
Advance booking is essential.**

For more information and to book, please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly,
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
Phone: 020 7240 2384 / Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

Letters to the Editor

Update on Unitarian belief survey

To the Editor:

This is just to say a huge THANK YOU to the 257 Unitarians and Free Christians who took the time and trouble to complete my survey about Unitarian beliefs and spirituality. The responses have been magnificent – I am in awe and gratitude at the depth of thinking behind them.

One conclusion I can share right now: Unitarians are wondrous in their diversity!

I will be on sabbatical from 8 July-22 September, during which time I will be analysing and writing up the results. Watch this space!

Thank you again,

Sue Woolley

District Minister

Midland Unitarian Association

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Is there hope for democracy?



William F Schulz reports from the front line of the fight for Human Rights

Decision on whom to save goes beyond nationality

To the Editor:

May I respond to William F Schulz's interesting address, printed in the 1 July issue? I fully agree that nature drives us to prioritise the lives of our own children, and the children of close relations. But is there any evidence that, for instance, an English person would be biologically driven, in a life-threatening emergency, to save another English person rather someone who is French or Chinese or American, etc.?

It seems intuitively unlikely, since I know that if it came to the push (heaven-forbid), I would save Nelson Mandela, Maya Angelou, Rumi, St Theresa and many, many others of different races rather than a randomly chosen fellow English person.

But in any case, it is, surely, impossible to say just where instinctual drives turn into more conscious and reasoned decisions.

Christine Avery

Plymouth Unitarians

Schulz's words inspired hope

To the Editor:

Thank you so much for publishing in the last *Inquirer* the text of that inspiring speech given by the Rev Dr William F Schulz at the gathering of 'European Unitarians Together' in Germany recently. When I read his magnificent message of hope I know why I became a Unitarian! It is by far the best article that has appeared in the magazine in recent times.

Graham Williams

Bridgnorth

It's impossible to evaluate cultures

To the Editor:

The Rev Dr William Schulz believes that democracy 'is the best system of government devised by humans,' that it depends on cosmopolitanism which is, however, in our nature to resist, and that this resistance can be overcome by our power of reason. (*Inquirer*, 1 July) There is, however, a quite different view of the world which was put by the American Anthropological Association to the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In their submission they wrote, among other things: '...it is a truism that groups are composed of individuals, and human beings do not function outside the societies of which they form a part. The problem is thus to formulate a statement of human rights that will do more than just phrase respect for the individual.

'It must also take into full account the individual as a member of the social group of which he is a part, whose sanctioned modes of life shape his behaviour, and with whose fate his own

is thus inextricably bound. ...

'There can be no full development of the individual personality as long as the individual is told, by men who have the power to enforce their commands, that the way of life of his group is inferior to that of those who wield power. ...'

They added, that 'no technique of qualitatively evaluating cultures has been discovered.' In other words, reason doesn't help us in this respect. We continue to ignore this advice at our peril. For example, we are expected to believe that so-called Islamist terrorists have been infected with a mental disease called 'extremism', that this drives them to an irrational hatred of the West, whose way of life they wish to destroy, and that the source of this infection is 'radicalisation'.

In my view this psychologising of our enemy is simply a turning inside out of the reality that we are trying to destroy their way of life, and they, however much we may abhor their methods, are fighting to defend it.

Francis Clark-Lowes

Brighton Unitarians

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

Fest celebrates poets who never grew old

By Peter Sampson

The Third Annual Poetry Festival of the North, organised by the Rev Jim Corrigan on behalf of the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry took place over the first three Saturdays of June in Padiham Unitarian Chapel. It marked the centenary of the death of Edward Thomas, killed at Arras in 1917 and linked him with Wilfred Owen killed in action 1918, Isaac Rosenberg killed in 1918 and Keith Douglas killed at Normandy in 1944. This series attracted me as a former teacher of English Literature; it was rich, vivid and disturbing fare. As a pacifist, I have always struggled to come to terms with the contradictions of condemning war and fighting (and killing) as a soldier. We are all, of course, complex personalities and these poets speak to us in a challenging, deeply human way of being alive.

Owen is the most straightforward for me. In his poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' ('pro patria mori') – 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's native land' – which he calls 'the old lie', he describes the men poisoned in a gas attack struggling to return to their own lines and you are never in any doubt that war is never glamorous and it is the men who suffered humiliation and degradation with whom he felt the utmost sympathy. It has always been for me a total contradiction of the sentiment of Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen' – "they shall grow not old", "We will remember them" – which places dying for your country above living a full, rich life. It was the politicians whom Owen condemned, not 'the years'.

Rosenberg's sardonic reflections in 'Break of Day in the Trenches' has an echo of Owen's famous 'Strange Meeting': Rosenberg pictures a rat leaping from an English hand to a German, grinning as he passes

*Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
less chanced than you for life.*

These poets died in their 20s, before they had hardly started their poetic careers. The fragmentary state of Keith Douglas's manuscripts bears testimony to the contradictions of a soldier's life, as in 'Aristocrats': these are 'an obsolescent breed of heroes', 'unicorns almost', 'stupidity and chivalry' combined to equate 'joining up' with playing cricket. He had



Padiham Poetry Festival readers and speakers celebrate after the second night (from left): Gillian Peel, Jim Corrigan, Theresa Sowerby and David Rushton. Photo: John Hewerdine.

started writing in his early teens and some of his early efforts avoid the inevitable ambivalences of the 'war poems'. I like 'On Leaving School'.

Interestingly Edward Thomas may never have been a poet at all if he had not met the American poet Robert Frost in the last three of his 39 years. He had written many prose books concerned with the struggle of attempting to understand the contradictions of Imperialism and Socialism and the apparent pastoralism of a poem like 'Adlestrop' has a distinct subtext of Thomas's identifying himself with the land which his fellow countryman worked on and which war was going to waste and destroy.

I am indebted to the three well-qualified speakers who vividly presented the programme: Theresa Sowerby on Owen and Rosenberg, Jim Corrigan on Edward Thomas and Edmund Spenser on Douglas. I look forward to next year's Poetry Festival.

Peter Sampson is a member of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

British Red Cross collects for London Fire Relief Fund

The British Red Cross with the Clara Barton Unitarian Fund announces an emergency appeal to help survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire in West London.

By donating to the British Red Cross London Fire Relief Fund you will be able to help those who have been injured, bereaved, left destitute or traumatised by this tragedy.

If you wish to support this appeal please send your cheque, payable to the British Red Cross, to Laura Deacon, British Red Cross, London Fire Relief Fund, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL. Please mark the envelope 'Clara Barton Fund'. So far, Unitarians have raised almost £100,000 for various Red Cross appeals through the Clara Barton Fund.

Faith in Words

The annual summer issue of worship material, stories and meditations is coming up. Please send in prayers, addresses, meditations, art work, photographs – anything which is an expression of your faith – to *The Inquirer*. For more information or to submit material, email:

Inquirer@btinternet.com Or, send typed contributions to the editor's postal address on page 2.

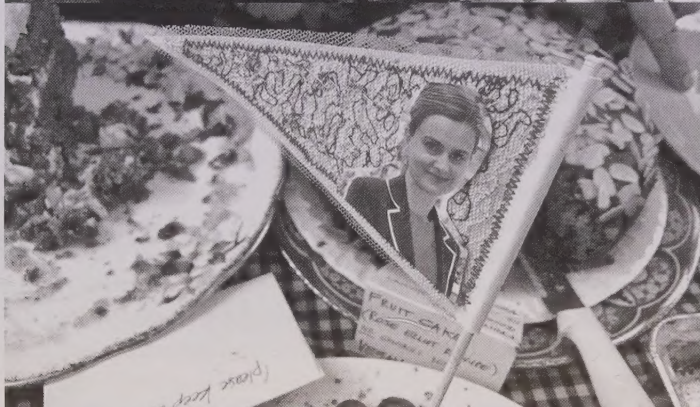
**Material is due by
25 July**

News in brief



The sun shone brightly on the weekend of 17/18 June for the Great Get Together in memory of MP Jo Cox. Godalming Unitarians' Community Tea Party made the most of the weather, with tea, lots of cake, and music from Godalming Youth Band. Neighbours and members of all the different chapel groups chatted in the chapel garden which was festooned with gingham bunting and balloons. The #moreincommon theme was continued in the Sunday service to round off a fitting tribute to Jo Cox.

— Louise Baumberg



Young musicians play a concert at Mansfield

It is a delight, much to the surprise of visiting preachers, that our Old Meeting House Unitarian Chapel in Mansfield still has a regular chapel choir. It also recently hosted a Saturday lunch-time concert that featured six young musicians of the future.

The photograph shows the two singers, a tenor-horn player, a jazz pianist, a violinist, and our own Assistant Organist, 20-year-old Tom Williams on the chapel organ, with the local, celebrated Meryll Chambers who was the accompanist. The morning which included the regular Saturday coffee morning, plus a sale of home-made cakes, as well as the concert, raised a magnificent sum of £555 for the local John Eastwood Hospice.

Now, with the retirement of Dr William Brown, who has been the organist and choirmaster over the past 25 years, his grandson Tom is taking over as Chapel Organist. Tom is already planning a series of monthly Saturday lunchtime Music Recitals with guest appearances, starting in September.

— Pauline and Derek Smith

